

# Measuring Measurement: Journal Acceptance Ratios

Keyan G Tomaselli

Academia can be very myopic, as universities have basically become degree factories. The university housing the author of the first quote below does not trust the actual peer review and extensive editorial work done in considering a submission. Rather, it wants to assess quality on the basis of a negative index. The higher the rejection rate the better the journal, seems to be the assumption. So, in playing the metric game, many journals deliberately and routinely reject a high proportion of submissions accepted by referees to create the (mis)impression of a high impact journal.

I am working on my mid-tenure application and my director has asked about acceptance rates for *Critical Arts* in which I have an article. (American academic)

I am grateful for what you have done to improve my work. I also work on the editorial board for a handful of journals and have learned from the collaborative teamwork and consensus making. You have done a terrific job. (Taiwanese academic)

Thus we must consider the implications of measuring measurement as a metric for Journal acceptance ratios<sup>1</sup>.

The second quote from a Taiwanese author was submitted after s/he had complained about a very extensive peer review and editorial process that required multiple revisions, one that exhausted both him and my *Critical Arts* editorial team.

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller analysis see: Keyan G. Tomaselli (2019) Humanities, Citations and Currency: Hierarchies of Value and Enabled Recolonisation, *Critical Arts*, 33:3, 16-29, DOI: [10.1080/02560046.2019.1690534](https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2019.1690534)

To the first author we responded: it is not possible to generate acceptance ratios across the journal due to the different assessment mechanisms applied between single submissions, themed guest edited issues, and special editions arising out of research seminars linked to ongoing projects. Each of these use different assessment criteria.

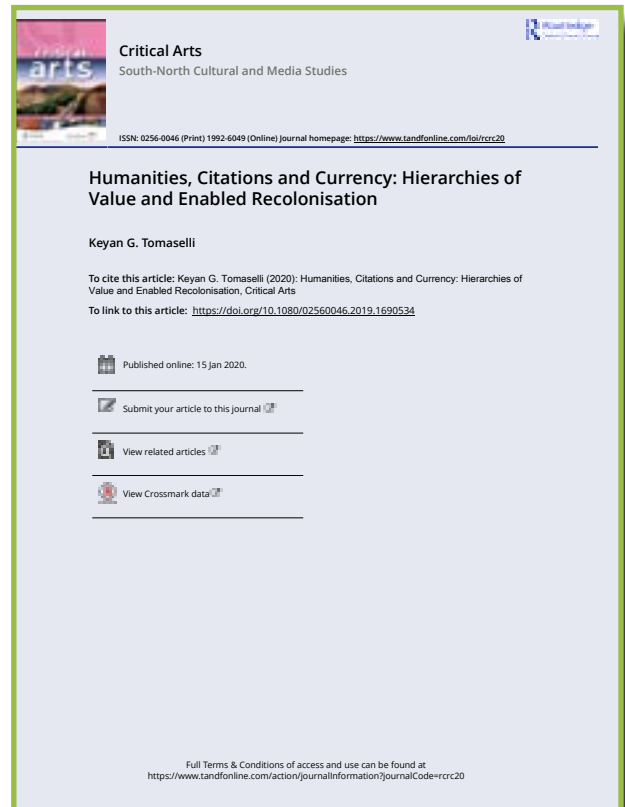
i) A guest edited issue might attract 200 proposals from the circulation of a call for papers, of which only 10 are accepted, and maybe two of these are rejected when the full articles are evaluated.

ii) With regard to single submissions, the rejection rate is about 50%,

iii) while for numbers arising out of projects, rejection could be as low as 5-10% as such numbers arise from very close and longer-term working relationships between the workshoped project, the journal's guest editors, the journal editor and authors, over a period of or two or more years.

iv) Beyond these are the many uninvited submissions from self-appointed guest editors unknown wanting *Critical Arts* to publish full pre-determined numbers, all of which are declined.

v) Then there are the endless well-written two-page proposals offered in detailed technical report form sent us by individual authors hoping for our attention, few of which fit with the journal. And, finally, there are the article brokers who place submissions on behalf



***“Beyond these are the many uninvited submissions from self-appointed guest editors unknown wanting Critical Arts to publish full pre-determined numbers”***

continued on page 5:

## Never Mind The Quality, Feel The Width

**continued from page 4:**  
of contracting writers. Consider this invitation:

We are a group of professors, doctors, scientists interested in publishing our articles in well-reputed Journals indexed in Scopus and in Web of Science. Our major interest is publishing of our 10-20 articles regularly, issue by issue ... We would like to discuss possible ways of partnership to be published in your Journal, such as individual articles, manuscript blocks for guest editors, both in regular issues and special issues. We are ready to pay publication fee (APC Fee) for articles. Every paper is ready-to-be-published, translated into academic English, edited and has the IMRAD structure. (IMRAD refers to Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion.)

<http://www.groupofscientists.org/journals/>

**C**ritical Arts rarely applies the IMRAD approach. Similarly, a research institute sent me this request in January 2021:

As we are aware of, there are many Iranian students and professors who are willing to publish their research materials in your journal; hence, we can introduce these applicants to your journal who are all willing to pay a fee for the publication of their research paper. Therefore, we can introduce such candidates to your journal and gain your acceptance for publications within 15 to 30 days. The fee attained can be negotiated. Furthermore, this collaboration can be in the form of an agreement contract.

We all have come together to cooperate in the most intimate way.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward

to speaking with you regarding this opportunity

**T**he quaintness and politeness of these collegiate appeals is indicative of the larger problem.

The push to publish everywhere is distorting the academic publication market. Groups like these are inserting finished product into a publication lottery in which the journal and its editors simply provide platforms as does a cinema which screens, rather than, makes films.

The cinema is a venue, and as the two above proposals suggest, journals are on occasion seen to be just a paid-for site. And, the primary market is the academic bureaucracy that has to administer performance management forms based on discrete indices that measure only the technical performance of the institution, rather than the social impact of the study. Readers, like students, colleagues and professionals become irrelevant in this bureaucratic emphasis.

Indexes like Clarivate Analytics, ProQuest and Scopus, the pre-eminent global scientific indexes, are the legitimization or branding systems that confer academic value on journals – hence the offers to pay. But the indexes do not measure acceptance:rejection ratios. Even impact factors (IF) are unhelpful in assessing the value of a journal. What IFs measure is citations within the year or two of publication, which is a nonstarter for the Humanities – which tend to consist of low citation disciplines and which exemplify longer half-lives. The indexes are constantly reformatting IFs in trying to make them more nuanced.

So it is puzzling that academic auditors continue to ask for metric information from authors in their employ. All that such bean counters are measuring is the measure itself.

### Humanities, Citations and Currency: Hierarchies of Value and Enabled Recolonisation

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#### ABSTRACT

A comparative analysis examines the relevance of journal measurement indices for the humanities and the sciences. The analysis explains how different measurements work, what they measure and their impact on the integrity of research, paradigm change and citation levels. The increasing use by university auditors of impact factors as performance management and research output indicators is critically examined with regard to implications for the humanities. The effect of this neoliberal approach on African-based academic developments is examined, as are the intellectually re-colonising effects of such systems

#### KEYWORDS

Impact factors; citation; Department of Higher Education and Training incentive; publishing; South Africa; metrics Ninety

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